



*Angie's position is bringing
her congratulatory letters from
all over the world.*

When racial turmoil threatened to undo
orderly integration in Van Buren,
15-year-old Angie Evans took a firm stand

an Arkansas junior pointed





In art class, lone Negro gets assistance from the teacher. Before integration, he and other Negroes went to school in Fort Smith, Ark.

By **PATRICIA CARBINE** LOOK Staff Writer

the way

THE WAY YOUNG PEOPLE are turning back the tide of racial prejudice in the South was dramatically illustrated not long ago by a 15-year-old girl. She is Jessie Angeline Evans of Van Buren, Ark., just 140 miles from Little Rock.

Angie was elected president of the Van Buren High School Student Council at the end of her sophomore year. Now a junior, she is a straight-A student, obviously respected by the school's administration and its 620 students. Angie's father runs a grocery store. She has an older brother and sister, both married. The Evanses are members of St. John's Methodist congregation, where they have often heard that racial crises can best be solved by Christian principle.

In most ways, Angie is not very different from the other students, but she has a maturity and seriousness that set her apart. As one of the senior girls puts it, "I don't know, you'd just have to call her fabulous. She seems to handle everything the right way."

This fall, Angie found herself in the middle of a nearly lawless segregationist turmoil. The events that led up to it had their beginnings in an October, 1955, law suit. Several Negro families in Van Buren, represented by the regional counsel for the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, filed a petition asking that their children be admitted to local schools.

Legalities dragged on. The Van Buren School Board undertook finally to integrate students at the high-school level first, starting in September, 1957. The petitioners consented to the proposal, and Judge John E. Miller approved it. When 24 Negroes peacefully enrolled at the school, Van Buren High had become integrated by mutual agreement, not by court order. At the end of one year, Van Buren was one of eight Arkansas communities with a record of successful integration.

Then, on last September 2, school reopened. When 14 Negro students arrived to attend classes, a group of 40 to 50 open-shirted white boys stood jeering them and insulting them with placards reading, "Niggers Go Home!" They even burned a Negro effigy on the school flagpole. The group declared themselves "strikers" and said they would maintain their vigil "until the Negroes are removed." They telegraphed Gov. Orval Faubus: "... In order to stay integration, we need your help." The wire was signed "Roger Williams," but there is no

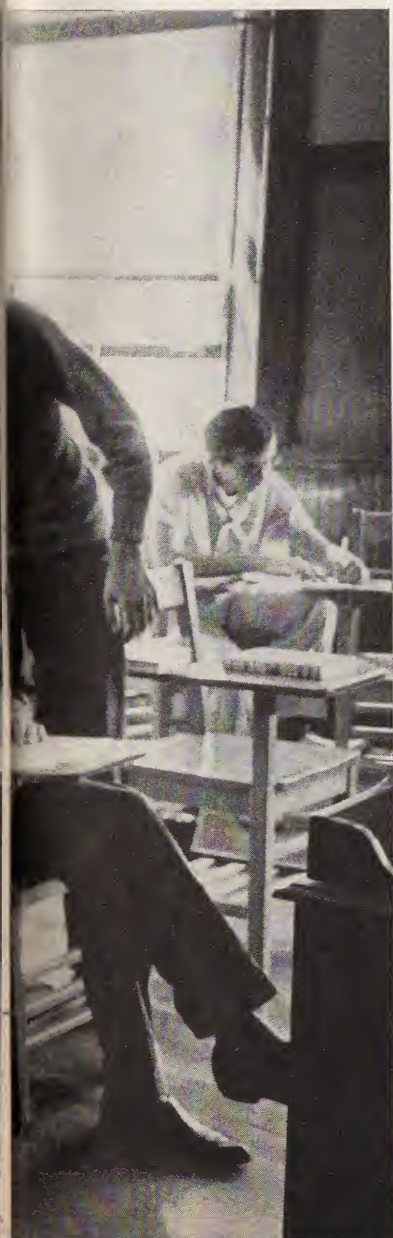
Roger Williams on school records. Faubus was quoted as saying, "I don't know what to do about the Van Buren situation. I will have to check into it."

Although most students tried to keep school as normal as possible, the pressure was too great for the Negro students. They withdrew after three days of classes. Almost overnight, a Citizens Council was organized among Van Burenites. It endorsed the strike, as did the city's police chief, Voll Russell. The group said it would support any measure short of violence to keep colored students out of the schools. Superintendent Everett Kelley and Principal Calvin Patterson took vigorous action. They expelled 78 strikers, requiring them to appear with their parents for readmission. The offenders straggled back, but to an all-white school.

It appeared that orderly integration in Van Buren had been totally undone by an intransigent minority. While the NAACP began to fight the impasse through the courts, a crucial meeting of the school board was scheduled for September 10. Members of the citizens' group began firing away at the school board. Then, Angie Evans asked to be heard. She reported that in a poll of 160 students, 85 were in favor of letting Negroes attend Van Buren; 45 were opposed, and 30 undecided. "We think it is only fair that the Negroes be permitted to attend this high school," she said. And she asked, "Have you ever thought what you make those Negro children feel like, running them out of school?" Several people at the meeting subjected Angie to angry questioning. But she held firm, saying, "I just don't think segregation is a Christian thing."

A week later, with practically all the strikers reinstated and the student council actively promoting the football season, 10 Negro students reappeared at school (the others had relocated). Student spokesmen were confident that "everything will be all right, if we're allowed to work this out by ourselves." Stunned by the teen-agers' levelheadedness, segregationists since then have done nothing more than "look for incidents of tension or misbehavior," something school officials have been alert to prevent.

All Angie wants today is to slip back into her former anonymity. Even an avalanche of congratulatory mail from around the world has not convinced her that she has done anything especially courageous. She says, simply, "Someone had to speak up." **END**



Forced from school during a two-week fracas, Negroes are back at their desks once more. Here, a French class gets a test.